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Tips for presenting and lecturing

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This article forms the last in a series of articles published in *In Practice*, aimed at providing veterinary staff and students with tips and tools to enhance the teaching moments which occur on a daily basis in practice with students, colleagues and clients. Previous articles in the series have focussed on giving tips for fitting teaching into a busy working day, giving effective feedback, and tips for small group teaching and teaching practical skills. This article will focus on tips for optimising presentations or lectures for colleagues and clients as well as students, and will draw from both the literature and the authors' experience.

Preparing your Presentation

1. Length of time available

What length of timeslot do you have available for your presentation? This is often pre-determined, particularly at conferences or meetings, however a recognised rule of thumb for Powerpoint presentations is to include a maximum of one 1 slide per minute, and preferably less than this so you have adequate time to 'talk around' your slides.

2. Facilities and Equipment available

What room will you be giving your presentation in, and what audio-visual facilities will it contain? It is important to check in advance whether you can plug your own laptop into the projector, or whether you will need to e-mail it to the organisers in advance or take it with you on the day on a USB stick. Both of the latter methods will limit the size of file that you can use, and it may not be possible to embed large files such as videos into your presentation. Also, if using a Macbook, it is strongly recommended to take your own Mac projector adaptor with you on the day.

3. Identify your audience

When starting to plan your presentation, try to identify the size of your potential audience, who the audience consist of, and what their background level of knowledge is likely to be. This can help you to 'pitch' your presentation at the correct level, and also to anticipate any issues or questions that may arise. Encouraging audience interaction may be more challenging with large numbers, however, some techniques can still be effective for this (see point 14).

4. Define key points you wish to convey

It can be very useful to define the **key points** that you wish to convey in your presentation at the very beginning of your planning, otherwise it is easy to wander "off track" as you put the presentation together. These key points can then be turned into **learning objectives** which describe what the learner should be able to do by the end of your presentation (see examples in Box 1). These learning objectives can then form the main outline for your presentation, and a **Presentation Plan** (similar to a lesson plan) will then help you to allocate estimated timings for each section e.g. Slides 1-3 (0-3 min): Introduction, Slides 4-6 (3-5 min): Defining the Problem, Slide 7 (6 min): Question for Audience: "What techniques have you used for repairing inguinal hernias?" etc.

Inclusion of an initial overview slide in your presentation which lists your learning objectives or key topics for the session can be very useful, as this can help your audience to establish 'mental folders' in their brains for the information that you are about to present (as we described in article 1 in this series), and also helps them to keep 'on track' during your presentation.

5. Slide design and content

If using Powerpoint or similar presentation software, select a **pale background** (white or pale cream) with **dark font** (black) and minimal background graphics in order for your slide content to display as clearly as possible. This is important if you have also distributed handouts to your audience, as their eyes will need to accommodate between the paper and the screen, so a consistent colour scheme is important. Also, from a logistical and cost point of view printing handouts from Powerpoint slides with dark backgrounds uses a lot more ink and fonts often display poorly when compared to printing slides with white backgrounds

Select **fonts with rounded characters** e.g Arial, Verdana, Calibri, and avoid complicated fonts or entire bullet points composed of capital letters as these can be difficult to read for your audience. Also, use a **minimum font size of 20 point** (visibility can be markedly reduced for audience members sitting at the back of the room, or for those who may not have 20/20 vision), and also remember that some of the audience may be red/green colour blind, so **avoid red/green colour coding** (e.g. for 'good' versus 'bad')

In terms of the volume of information on a slide, a recommended rule of thumb to work to is **6 bullet points per slide, with 6 words per bullet point**.

If you like to use **animations** to introduce your bullet points, try to be consistent with the animation selection that you use throughout the presentation, and avoid using animations that may be particularly distracting (e.g. flying in from the right hand side with an accompanying drum roll sound!). It is also worth checking your presentation in 'Presentation' mode to ensure that the order of your animations is correct, and on the day of your presentation try to check this on the computer that you will be using, particularly if you have transferred your file from a Mac to a PC (as animations and images often transfer across poorly).

6. Present information in multiple formats

In order to appeal to audience members with differing learning styles (see article 1 in this series for more information about learning styles), try to present information in **multiple formats** where possible, for example bullet point text, diagrams, photos, videos, graphs etc. See Box 2 for other examples.

Photos can be extremely effective visual aids, however, don't fall into the trap of including them 'just for the sake of it' – ensure that they are **relevant** to the rest of the information on that slide, limit the **number** per slide to a maximum of three or four and ensure that they can be displayed at an **appropriate size**. If the photograph is not your own it is also very important to check what **copyright restrictions** exist for that image. If a friend or colleague has given you permission to use one of their images, acknowledge them beneath the photo e.g. © Jane Smith. It is also very important to be aware that copying an image from a website such as Google images is not generally acceptable and may infringe copyright laws. Check for copyright information such as Creative

Commons Licences that define what an image may be used for (you can do this through the 'Advanced Search' function in Google Images), and if in doubt, do not use that image. Also always **acknowledge the copyright of any image** in small font beneath (or embedded within) the image.

Video clips can also be very useful visual aids for illustrating key points within a presentation and for varying the presentation formats, however, try to use short clips (less than 5 mins) in order to maintain audience attention. Also, take care if embedding a video clip into a Powerpoint presentation; it is wise to recheck that the video is linked and plays correctly on the computer that you will be using for your presentation. As a precaution, ensure that you also have the video available as a separate file so that you can show it outwith Powerpoint if necessary. Take care if using a direct weblink to the internet for accessing a video (e.g. on Youtube), and ensure that you have tested the weblink in advance on the computer that you will be using for your presentation.

If you are using images of patients or clients, it is essential to ask the client for permission beforehand.

7. Practise links and explanations

It is extremely useful to prepare in advance (and practise) phrases that **link** one slide to another, and **explanations** for any diagrams, images, graphs or tables. In more general terms, there is also no substitute for '**practise, practise, practise**' of your presentation, particularly so that you can be confident in your timings, and your ability to verbalise key links and explanations – the 'Slide Show/ Rehearse Timings' can be a very useful tool to help with this.

8. Check in presentation room in advance

As mentioned already, this is particularly important if you have transferred your presentation from a Mac to a PC or vice versa (fonts and animations don't always transfer well), or if you are using embedded video clips or linking to 'live' online resources.

Delivering your Presentation

9. Getting the audience's attention

Dimming the lights can be an effective way to get the audience's attention if there is a lot of background chatter. Wait for everyone's attention before starting, then look at the audience, smile (!) and introduce yourself – what is your background, and why are you giving this presentation?

10. Introductions and delivery

If the format of the presentation is flexible, state whether you are happy to take questions throughout your presentation or prefer to take them at the end (the latter is easier to control in terms of timings and avoiding 'going off track'). Make the relevance of your topic explicit as a 'hook' at start of your presentation – why is it important that audience members understand this concept/know this information/ how is it relevant to them? Then speak slowly, clearly and enthusiastically, and check that audience members at the back of the room can hear you. If necessary, briefly recap key concepts or issues for your audience; it is safer to assume a lower level of background knowledge and recap key info, rather than pitching your presentation at a level that is inappropriate for your audience.

11. Engaging your audience

Talking animatedly and enthusiastically about your topic will help to engage your audience. However, if you feel comfortable to, it is also possible to use techniques to elicit discussion and responses from you audience. For example, you can embed discussion questions within your slides and ask audience members to turn to the person beside them and discuss the question for 30 seconds before volunteering answers to the whole room. Audience response devices such as clickers can also be used effectively in combination with multiple choice type questions to canvass opinion or to ensure understanding of key concepts before moving on. However, such devices do require specific software and hardware in order to function effectively. A cheaper and more accessible version of the audience response system can be generated either by a show of hands, or by issuing each audience member with different coloured cards that they hold up in response to various question options.

Closing your Presentation

12. Summarising

If your Presentation Plan and practising have worked effectively, you should have adequate time (in the region of five minutes) to draw your presentation to a close in a structured manner. During this time it is recommended that you draw your presentation to a close with a phrase such as “In conclusion ...” before briefly summarising your key points or restating your learning objectives once more. You can then thank the audience for their attention before inviting questions (either yourself or through a chairperson, depending on the format of the session).

13. Anticipating questions

Whilst planning your presentation, it is very useful to try to anticipate questions that you may be asked about your topic so that you can prepare appropriate responses. In order to do this you might like to consider ‘what would I ask if I was in the audience’, or ask friends or colleagues what questions they would ask you. One final tip – there is a strong possibility that someone will ask a question to which you don’t know the answer. You can minimise the stress of this situation by preparing a suitable response in advance e.g. “That’s not an area that I’m particularly familiar with, but textbook X or website Y might be a good place to find that information”.

Further reading

Holzl, J (1997). Twelve tips for effective Powerpoint presentations for the technologically challenged. *Medical Teacher*, 19(3), 175-179

Race, P (2008) Smarter Lectures; a collection. Freely downloadable from <http://phil-race.co.uk/downloads/>, accessed 18th December 2013

Further references are available from the authors

Box 1: Learning Objectives for this article:

By the end of reading this article you will be able to

1. Identify your audience and the appropriate level of information to include in your presentation.
2. Define key points that you wish to convey to your audience about your topic.
3. Select appropriate backgrounds, fonts, and number of points per slide.
4. Consider methods of conveying information to audience members with different learning styles.
5. Reference image sources appropriately, and identify copyright restrictions.
6. Anticipate questions that you may be asked about your topic.

Box 2**Ideas for appealing to audience members with a range of learning styles, for example:**

Visual learners (learn by seeing): Consistent and logical slide layout, clear diagrams, relevant photos, written quiz questions

Auditory learners (learn by hearing): Include a logical progression of a story or argument about your topic, relevant anecdotes, verbal quiz questions

Kinaesthetic learner (learn by doing): Link to practical case-based scenarios, link with practical situations, link to topical news items, videos, quiz questions, flashcards

Note that many different learning styles are described; these are just examples.